

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2647
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C O N F I D E N T I A L GABORONE 2101

E.O. 11652 GDS
TAGS: PINR MOPS BC
SUBJ: RHODESIA: MILITARY PRESSURE AND THREATS AGAINST BOTSWANA

REF: GABORONE 1975

1. AT JULY 4 RECEPTION, VICE PRESIDENT MASIRE (NORMALLY A MOST CAUTIOUS AND CONSERVATIVE INTERLOCUTOR) COMMENTED TO A SMALL GROUP INCLUDING VISITING AFR/SA DEPUTY VIVIAN ANDERSON, DCM AND MYSELF THAT GOB HAD EVIDENCE TO INDICATE RHODESIAN REGIME WOULD SOON INITIATE STRIKES AGAINST BOTSWANA, "TO TAKE THE PRESSURE OFF". HIS REMARK CAME IN CONTEXT OF OUR MUTUAL DEPLORING OF UNMOTIVATED ATTACKS ON HELPLESS UNARMED CIVILIANS IN RHODESIA. THE CLEAR IMPLICATION WAS THAT THESE ATTACKS CREATED "PRESSURES" THAT WERE LEADING RHODESIAN LOCAL COMMANDERS TO CONTEMPLATE BLIND RETALIATION AGAINST BOTSWANA. THE VICE PRESIDENT'S CONCERN WAS ECHOED THE FOLLOWING DAY IN THE DAILY NEWS, WHICH CARRIED A GOB STATEMENT CAUTIONING BATSWANA AWAY FROM BORDER FENCE AND WARNING THAT RHODESIA WHEN DESPERATE IS WONT TO USE "HOT PURSUIT" ATTACKS AGAINST ITS NEIGHBORS (SEPTTEL).

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2. IN EARLIER PRIVATE DISCUSSVNS JUNE 30 BOTSWANA DEFENSE FORCE (BDF) COMMANDER GENERAL MERAFHE INFORMED ME THAT DURING JUNE 25 RHODESIAN ATTACK AGAINST BDF FORCES NEAR MATSILOJE (REFTEL, THE RHODESIANS USED AIRCRAFT TO BOMB AND STRAFE BDF PERSONNEL. REACTING TO MY SKEPTICAL QUESTIONING, MERAFHE SAID HE WOULD WELCOME VISIT OF AN OBJECTIVE OBSERVER WHO COULD WITNESS CRATERS ON THE BOTSWANA SIDE OF THE BORDER AS EVIDENCE

OF THE RHODESIAN ACTION. HE REGRETTED BDF DID NOT YET HAVE PHOTOGRAPHS; STILL THEY WOULD BE NO SUBSTITUTE FOR PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS OF A PROFESSIONAL COLLEAGUE, SUCH AS U.S. MILITARY ATTACHE, WHO COULD HELP COUNTER AND CORRECT RHODESIAN AND OTHER MEDIA.

3. COMMENT: THE MOOD OF HEIGHTENED TENSIONS HERE REFLECTING WHAT IS PERCEIVED AS DETERIORATION OF SECURITY SITUATION IN RHODESIA GIVES A PRACTICAL DIMENSION TO THE QUESTION OF DATT ACCREDITATION. GOB'S DEEP SENSE OF INSECURITY STEMS NOT ONLY FROM ITS ACKNOWLEDGED MILITARY INFERIORITY BUT ALSO FROM THE OVERWHELMING POWER OF RHODESIAN/SOUTH AFRICAN MEDIA WHICH, GOB OFFICIALS BELIEVE, DISTORT GOB POLICY AND ACTIONS. THE GOB IS PREPARED TO LET FACTS SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES, CONFIDENT IN THE BELIEF THAT THEY WILL CONVINCE ANY OBJECTIVE OBSERVER, WITH RESULTING PSYCHOLOGICAL AND (THEY HOPE) MATERIAL SUPPORT. I BELIEVE THE OFFER TO ALLOW TRAINED U.S. OBSERVER IN PERSON OF U.S. MILITARY ATTACHE IN PRETORIA (WHOM GENERAL MERAFHE HAS MET INFORMALLY) TO VISIT THE AREA DISCREETLY PROVIDES AN EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITY TO ADVANCE PRIORITY U.S. POLICY OBJECTIVES INCLUDING HELPING TO STABILIZE BOTSWANA'S DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM AND STRENGTHEN THE FORCES FAVORING PEACEFUL SOLUTIONS TO PROBLEMS OF THE AREA. I EARNESTLY HOPE ACTION ON QUESTION OF ACCREDITATION OF DATT/PRETORIA WILL NOT BE LONG DELAYED.
NORLAND

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